

HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES INVOLVED IN THE APPRAISAL
OF THE 1963 ESSAY ON GENESIS 3

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I. A. Presuppositions

It will be well to state, even at the risk of saying the obvious, our common, shared presuppositions as interpreters of the Holy Scriptures. By so doing, we shall establish a platform on which we speak to one another and not past one another; we shall reduce the tensions which tend to become exaggerated in the course of a serious and vital discussion such as ours; we shall, one may hope, temper the clash of conflicting opinions and convictions and make possible a fraternally energetic and fruitful interchange of views. The following presuppositions are, I believe, shared by all parties to this discussion. If they are not shared by all, it is of critical importance that the differences be brought to light and be examined by the Light. Otherwise we cannot proceed with profit.

We say in our Confessions that "we believe, teach, and confess."

These three verbs correspond to the three realities that are the presuppositions of our work as interpreters of the Scriptures. They are: the past, irrevocable fact of our baptism; the present, inescapable reality of our life and ministry in the church; and the future, inexorable certainty of the Last Judgment. In other words, we are sacramentally, diaconically, and eschatologically oriented when we approach the Scriptures, the Word of God.

We are sacramentally oriented. Our baptism determines our posture as interpreters. In our baptism we have been made to share Christ's

* The essay referred to in this critique is Norman L. Habel's "The form and meaning of the Fall narrative".

death and His resurrection, and we henceforth live His resurrection-life, a life lived "to God." With our baptism we have received His Spirit, the Spirit who alone can and does lead us into all truth. Since our baptism we know the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ as our Father. This has happened to us in the midst of our flat, mundane, sinful history; and this determines our whole conception of history. If this can happen where God is at work, anything can happen; in the life of God's people and in the life of God's Son no ordinary laws of causality, no ordinary analogies, no usual probabilities hold. With God all things are possible, we know; for our baptism was possible. This determines our relationship to the Scriptures. We hear in the Old Testament the voice of the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ, as He heard there His Father's voice. We hear in the New Testament the voice of the Good Shepherd who sought us and found us when we were gone astray and in our baptism became the Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. The unity of the Testaments is for us axiomatic. For the Church that baptized us, baptized us on the authority of the voice of the Triune God heard in all the Scriptures. Our attitude toward Scriptures is therefore a complete and eager openness to the text as it speaks to us and a complete and glad submission to the text as it is heard and understood by us.

We are diaconically oriented, for we are in virtue of our Baptism, in the Church. In the Church we are served; we comprehend with all the saints. In the Church we serve; exegesis is a ministry, and all interpretation, even the most technically-scholarly, serves to edify the Body of Christ. There is no room in exegesis for the sounding brass and the tinkling cymbals that serve only the ego of the exegete. Nihil nisi quod prodest carum est.

The Church is the company of those who listen to the Good Shepherd's voice and cry, "Our Lord, come!" The interpreter who lives and serves in the church knows that all roads, including the interpreter's road, end at the judgment-throne of the returning Christ. At that throne we shall all be made manifest; and we shall have to give account of every word we spoke, every book, every article, every footnote we wrote. Woe to us if those words have been idle words.

I. B. Agreement and Divergence

We assume that the essayist shares these presuppositions and is approaching his text in full consciousness of them. He has subscribed to the Lutheran Confessions, together with us all, and takes that subscription seriously. He "is not asserting that previous formulations /i.e. formulations current in our circles⁷ of the truth of the fall of the first man are necessarily incorrect" (p. 2); his "study asks the question whether" his "reformulation . . . is acceptable within the Lutheran Church" (p. 1; emphases mine). Moreover, the "reformulation: which he puts forward as an alternative to "the so-called 'traditional position' of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod: (p. 1) is not a head-on attack upon the traditional position nor radically different from it in most of the theological essentials. It may be well, for clarity's sake, to demarcate as precisely as possible the areas of agreement and divergence.

1. Areas of Agreement

The essayist is in this essay in accord with the traditional position of our Church:

- a. in asserting the inspiration, authority, and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God to us.

- b. in taking seriously the narrative of the Fall as it stands, in its present canonical form and context in Genesis.
- c. in taking seriously the narrative of the Fall as the account of a one-time and once-for-all historical event that determines all the subsequent history of mankind.
- d. in maintaining that the darkness of the curse on fallen man is lightened by a ray of hope.

The documentation for these four points is as follows.

- a. The essayist asserts the inspiration, authority, and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures as the Word of God to us.

On pp. 9-10 he writes: ". . . it is widely recognized that Genesis 1-11 deals principally with theological questions such as the relationship of God to His creation, to man, to life and death, to temptation, sin and guilt, and so forth. But Genesis 1-11 is more than 'theological questions'; it is the inspired infallible Word of God [emphasis mine], and we who acknowledge this truth must therefore approach the religious concerns of the writer as our own concerns, and we must listen to God speaking through the word of the text to us [emphasis in original] . . . it is incumbent upon the Christian exegete to hear God speaking to us, first of all, when we become a part of the Israelite audience to which the biblical writer addressed himself and to hear that inspired writer address us on his own terms." And on p. 1 the author speaks of his desire and resolve to maintain "an attitude of subservience and surrender to Holy Scripture."

- b. The essayist takes seriously the narrative of the Fall as it stands, in its present canonical form and context in Genesis.

The essayist declines to go into the question of source-analysis and goes on to say: "It is the conviction of the essayist that the account of Genesis 2-3, as we know it, must be treated as a literary unit . . . We are here concerned with the narrative of Genesis 2-3 (and of Genesis 3 in particular) in its present form . . . we must ask what this passage, as it stands, meant to the writer and to the audience in the day of the writer.' (p. 7; emphasis in original).

c. The essayist takes seriously the narrative of the Fall as the account of a one-time and once-for-all historical event that determines all the subsequent history of mankind.

This comes out most clearly in the paragraph which begins at the bottom of page 25 and continues to the middle of page 26. Here the essayist clearly demarcates his conception of "symbolic history" over against "myth" and parable and insists strongly that the "record of the Fall" is just that, a record of an event. It deserves to be quoted in full:

"It will further be argued, perchance, that by stressing the symbolic, figurative, theological and literary aspects of the biblical record of the Fall as we have done, that we have eliminated the historical event of the Fall altogether or that we have denied the historicity of the Fall event as such. Nothing could be further from the truth. The writer of Genesis is concerned with real facts of the past as he understands them, and one of these is the fact that God created the first man but that this man rebelled against God. The Heilsgeschichte structure of Genesis embraces not only the historical figures of Abraham and his posterity, but also the early chapters of Genesis. The myths of the ancient world are never found as a prelude to or a part of Heilsgeschichte in this manner. The narrative

account of Genesis 3, as we have previously insisted, is not merely a timeless myth such as those common in the ancient Near East, nor a universal parable or proverb such as 'all men are sinners,' but a representation in a culturally relevant manner of something that actually happened."

The essayist is somewhat at a loss to find an adequate and unassailably unambiguous term to describe the form of the narrative as he understands it (p. 13, especially n. 12, and pp. 22-23), but he is at pains to make clear that for him Genesis 3 speaks of a real event. Note the expressions: "the reality of the truth concerning the revolt of the first man (p. 13, n. 13; emphasis mine); "the first woman leads the first man into sin" (p. 17); "this individual is also a type, a representative, a symbol of universal Man" (p. 19; emphasis mine); "One could speak of a variant allusion to or formulation of the Fall event" (p. 24, n. 23; emphasis mine); "the same truth of Man's Fall . . . the narration of the event" (p. 25; emphasis mine); "the ancients often failed to make a clear distinction between a symbol and the corresponding reality" (p. 60, n. 66); "the first man is described" (p. 62; emphasis mine); "he Adam is viewed as an individual belonging to history, and not to some pre-historical or supra-terrestrial existence which has no kinship to that of the writer" (p. 62; emphasis mine). More examples might be adduced, but these seem to be representative and should suffice. The essayist has been most successful in expressing his intention in the last paragraph of his essay: "The writer of Genesis 3 has given us an artistic literary and theological portrait in depth of the historical reality of the fall of the first man" (p. 86; emphasis mine). A portrait is the delineation of a real person;

it must portray reality. That the portrait may depart from photograph's fidelity in order to bring home the full significance of the reality goes without saying.

d. The essayist maintains that the darkness of the curse on fallen man is lightened by a ray of hope.

The essayist is inclined to put a question mark before the traditional interpretation of Genesis 3:14-15 as Protevangelion: "It can be cogently argued that no obvious implication of ultimate victory or overriding divine grace is present in Genesis 3:14-15" (p. 61). Yet he does not see in Genesis 3 mere proclamation of condemning Law; he is sensitive to the Gospel implications of the message of this chapter: ". . . the curses in general as they relate to man suggest something other than total rejection before God. Man is offered life in the face of death; he is, by the grace of God [emphasis mine], permitted to survive his moment of sin, granted strength to continue the struggle, offered life in painful birth, and provided with the bread of blessing amid the trials of labor. The same viewpoint is suggested in the Cain epic where Cain, who is permitted to survive his heinous crime, bears the mark of a curse as the first murderer, yet is apparently 'forgiven,' granted grace to live amid the trials of wandering and provided with the blessing of divine protection. There is a dual perspective throughout the curses of Genesis 3; life under the curse offers grace in the face of death. The blessing of life and 'acceptance' is even more forcefully underscored by the subsequent designation of the first woman as hawa and by the gracious act of clothing the nakedness of the disgraced pair. The one reinforced God's offer of life and hope, the other focused upon the new status of man as a 'son of grace' before God." (pp. 61-62)

2. Areas of Divergence

The essayist in this essay diverges from our traditional position:

- a. in stressing the fact that the mode of the narrative is culturally relevant to the original Israelite audience and in drawing on the historical milieu of ancient Israel in an attempt to determine that relevance.
- b. in stressing the presence and significance of symbolic or figurative elements in the historical narrative of the Fall.
- c. in leaving open, or questioning, the "Protevangelion" character of Gen. 3:14-15.
- d. in declining to make a simple, direct identification between the Serpent and Satan (i.e., from the vantage-point of the original Israelite audience).
- e. in maintaining that man was created mortal.

II. The Three Hermeneutical Problems

Since these points will be documented in the ensuing discussion, documentation can be dispensed with here. The hermeneutical questions involved seem to be three:

1. The place of contemporary cultural relevance in the understanding and interpretation of the Word of God (point a above).
2. The use of symbol in biblical historical narrative (point b).
3. The unity of the Testaments: What is the ultimate context of the Old Testament? (Points c, d, e).

1. Cultural Relevance

The essayist stresses the fact that the mode of the narrative is such as to be culturally relevant to the original Israelite audience and draws

on the historical milieu of ancient Israel in an attempt to determine that relevance.

The three elements involved here are the tree of life, the tree of knowledge, and the serpent. In seeking to determine what these elements would suggest to the mind of the ancient Israelite, the essayist considers the religious-cultic life of the nations among whom Israel dwelt and comes to the following conclusions:

Concerning the serpent: "There is every reason to believe that when an Israelite thought of a snake playing a religious role (as it does in the present text) the prevailing association was with the serpent as the cultic symbol of fertility and fecundity Quite plausibly, then, the writer of Genesis 3 is asserting that this local symbol of the mysteries of life, wisdom, and fertility is neither a God nor a genuine symbol of fertility but a creature which God has made and the symbol of temptation for the people of Israel among the Canaanites and their neighbors. Any involvement with this symbol of 'the mystery of life' would lead the Israelite to sin and ultimately to death. The use of the symbol in this manner is therefore didactical and polemical." (pp. 32-33, emphasis mine). Note also the following sentences from the concluding paragraph of the section (pp. 35-36): "The author of Genesis 3, under the inspiration of God, was led to portray the temptation of the first man in a meaningful way. To do this he employed the figure of the snake which was a symbol of THE temptation par excellence for Israel throughout the pre-exilic period, that is, the fertility cult of Baalism. If this be true, then the snake is a representative of the mystery and character of temptation in a polemical form relevant for the writer's Israelite audience."

Concerning the tree of life: ". . . the 'tree of life,' 'the plant of life' or the 'fruit of life' are prevalent symbols for immortality. This tree . . . represents eternal life in various myths . . . and is found as a representation of life and immortality in ancient Near Eastern art and symbolism." (p. 38) "The life imparted through the tree of life is eternal life, a reality which the ancients thought could be achieved by various rites and means. The inspired writer of Genesis 3, however, insists that the gift of immortality is not man's natural privilege, nor that he can achieve it by any means as a natural gift, but that God alone reserves the right to dispense it. Such an assertion suggests an anti-mythical polemic against the numerous resurrection myths of the ancient world." (p. 39)

Concerning the tree of knowledge: "When the pre-exilic Israelites heard of the tree of knowledge which promised a forbidden range of experience, a hidden insight into the divine, a secret knowledge of the realm of the gods, a natural association would be made with Canaanite rites of magic, divination and fertility which promised similar knowledge. . . . In brief, the tree of knowledge represents the boundary or limitation of human knowing and experience within the realm of the divine, and any human efforts to break through that barrier by means of divination, magic, incantation, or by communion with the divine in fertility rites . . . or similar practices are simultaneously condemned" (pp. 47-48).

It may be wise to make two obvious observations at this point. First, the essayist is not suggesting that the religion of Israel is in any sense derived from or influenced substantively by the religions of Israel's pagan neighbors. Rather, it is his contention that the references

and allusions to surrounding paganism contained in "trees" and "serpent" are didactic and polemical, designed to safeguard and keep pure the faith of Israel which is founded on the true revelation of the one LORD.

Secondly, it is not our present task to pass judgment on the substance of the essayist's exegesis. That is, we are not now inquiring whether he has sufficiently substantiated his claim that the significance of the trees and the serpent is to be seen in the light of the role which they play in surrounding paganism. We are concerned, rather, with the heremeneutical question: What is the place of contemporary cultural relevance in the understanding and interpretation of the Word of God? May the Christian interpreter of the Holy Scriptures draw upon the culture and customs of the world about the Holy Scriptures (including the religious culture and customs) in his attempt to hear the Word of God on its own terms -- or does this procedure necessarily call into question the uniqueness of the Word of God?

We shall find the answer to this question only by observing the inspired texts themselves. It is both useless and presumptuous to speculate how the Holy Spirit ought to operate or how He might have operated or could have operated. As believing exegetes under the Scriptures we have only one option, that is, to observe how the Holy Spirit did operate. Do the words uttered in the power and under the impulse of the Spirit manifest "cultural relevance" to their first auditors, i.e., are they couched in terms taken from their range of experience? Let us look into the New Testament for our answer.

The very fact that the New Testament is written in Koine Greek, the cultural common denominator of the Mediterranean world in the first century, is in itself a witness to the Holy Spirit's concern for cultural relevance. The Spirit took the risk, as it were, of having His message Hellenized (which it was not) in order that the Lord of all might be proclaimed in the language of all.

Jesus, whose every Word was spoken "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14,15), spoke always in terms and images that were close and germane to the lives of His Palestinian hearers. The materials of His parables are taken from the world that every Palestinian knew: the garden, the farm, the kitchen, the fisherman's trade, master and slave, weddings, feasts, fastings, going to court, wineskins, patched clothing, the boy who left home, the dangerous road from Jerulalem to Jericho.

Even Jesus' strictly "religious" vocabulary was culturally relevant to first-century Palestine. His language is saturated with the juices of the bible of His people, the Old Testament. But beyond that, many of the expressions which we have come to think of as characteristic of Jesus, terms not directly traceable to the Old Testament, are expressions which He shares with the synagogue: "little faith," "treasure in heaven," "the righteous who have no need of repentance," "kingdom of heaven," "inherit the kingdom of heaven," "from above," "this world and the world to come," "the prince of the world," "paraclete," "the judgment of Gehenna."¹

When Jesus inveighed against the rottenness of the Judaic tradition that had grown up around the Law and had actually obscured the will of God revealed in the Law, He did so in terms of a concrete, culturally relevant instance. He cited the example of the Corban-vow (Mark 7:11-13). He alludes

to it so briefly, as something perfectly familiar to His hearers, that we should be hard put fully to understand His denunciation of this sorry piece of scribal casuistry if we did not have access to rabbinical writings concerning it.²

One of the most striking instances of cultural relevance in the words of Jesus occurs in the Parable of the Pounds (Luke 19:12-27). He describes the nobleman who entrusted his servants with the pounds before beginning his journey as going "to a far country to receive kingly power and then return." (v. 12) This is not the obvious or usual way for a nobleman to achieve kingship, and it must have struck his hearers. Then when they heard Jesus go on to say that the nobleman's "citizens hated him and sent an embassy after him, saying, 'We do not want this man to reign over us,'" (v. 14) they surely become aware that Jesus was speaking in terms close to their experience. They could not but recall a piece of history that had taken place within their memory. They would think of Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, who went to Rome to get his right to the throne confirmed by the Emperor, over against the claims of his brother Antipas. While he was in Rome, a Jewish deputation appeared there petitioning the Emperor to refrain from appointing any member of the Herodian house as king over the Jews. Thus we see Jesus stating His highest claim (that He is the Anointed King) and making His mightiest promise (that He will return in royal power and glory to reward and judge) in terms of a tawdry bit of Judaic court-history. This, surely, is cultural relevance: this is hitting people between the eyes.

The apostles are disciples of their Master in this respect also; even Paul, the apostle born out of due season, is a follower of Jesus in the

matter of cultural relevance. The example that first comes to mind is his use of the altar-inscription To the Unknown God in his Areopagus-sermon (Acts 17:23). Paul invades the domain of a false, polytheistic religion to find a term, or idea, which will enable him to proclaim the true God to the men of Athens in a relevant and compelling way. He does so without making any concessions to paganism (in fact, he uses the Athenian inscription as the basis for an attack on their paganism, Acts 17:24-29), and without sparing his hearers the proclamation of impending judgment and the call to repentance (Acts 17:30-31). But he does use culturally relevant material drawn from paganism to make his point. And he goes on to quote a pagan poet toward the same end (Aratus; Acts 17:28).

The letters of Paul likewise give evidence of this same striving for cultural relevance. Jesus had used no metaphors drawn from athletics. There were amphitheaters, stadia, and hippodromes in Palestine, too, of course, but the world of Graeco-Roman athletics remained remote from the life of the average Jew. In Paul's writings, however, there is a free use of athletic imagery (E.g., Col. 1:29; 1 Tim. 4:7 ff.; 2 Tim. 4.7-8; 1 Cor. 9:24-27), despite the fact that the great athletic festivals (such as the Olympian or the Isthmian games) were pagan religious celebrations.

"Our politeuma is in heaven," Paul writes to the Philippians (Phil. 3:20). Whatever the exact shade of meaning we attach to politeuma ("conversation," or "citizenship," or "commonwealth" or "metropolis"), it seems certain that Paul is alluding to Philippi's status as a Roman colonia with inhabitants who, though resident in Philippi, are citizens of Rome and proud of it. Paul is using a relevant aspect of civic life to bring home to the Philippians where their life is centered and what its real glory is.

In 2 Cor. 11:22-23 Paul "boasts," chiefly of his sufferings. It has been plausibly suggested that in this "boasting" Paul is consciously imitating the style of oriental royal inscriptions and of the res gestae inscriptions of Roman emperors, in which these worthies leave the world a record of their accomplishments.³ This would explain the lack of connectives, the frequent use of numerals, the recurrent "often," and other unusual stylistic features. This would be another example of how the Spirit prompted men to use a culturally relevant pagan form for Gospel purposes. Paul is in effect saying when he uses this form: "I can 'boast' with kings and emperors, if need be; but I must boast of my sufferings, for my conquests are the conquest of the suffering Anointed King."

John provides another example; it has long been recognized that the term used for Christ in the Johannine Prologue, Logos, had "cultural relevance" for the Greek world of 95 A.D. The fact that this aspect of Logos has often been wildly exaggerated should not blind us to this reality or lead us to ignore it. Gerhard Kittel has expressed the nature and extent of this cultural relevance carefully and precisely:

"It is quite believable that word-speculations in the world around the New Testament were not without influence on John's use of the 'Word'.⁷ The situation is this: four things coincide: first, the early-Christian-view, or conception, of Jesus as the "Word;" second, the likewise early-Christian conviction concerning the eternal, divine, pretemporal existence of the Christ; third, the recollection of the biblical account of the creative Word spoken 'in the beginning'; fourth, the logos-myths and logos-theories of the time. This situation induced the author of the Prologue to take up the key-word of these last logos-myths and logos-theorie

and to make them the thematic word of his sentences. It is a key-word which is also suggested to him by the speech of the bible and of early Christendom. But he gives this key-word a new place and a new accent. One could express it by writing a variation on Paul's words in 1 Cor. 8:5: "As there are many gods and many Lords -- and many 'words' . . ." The author presents his Logos, who is the one and the only Word and was -- " 'in the beginning;' the Logos who is not speculation about an indeterminate intermediary Being and not a metaphysical personification of a mythical conception but is, in Jesus, manifested Person and is in Him 'the Word.'"⁴

The Book of Revelation, written by John while he was "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1:11), provides many examples of cultural relevance. A few examples will have to suffice. We look in vain within the Scriptures for a clue to the meaning of the seven stars in the hand of the One like a son of Man in the inaugural vision (Rev. 1:16). The members of the seven churches were probably familiar with the seven stars as a symbol of worldwide dominion; they appear as such on Imperial coins. The inspired prophet is, then, taking a pagan symbol and is using it to deny the Imperial claim. "Jesus," he says, "not Caesar, is Lord." And when the seven stars are interpreted to signify the "angels of the seven churches" (Rev. 1:20), the prophet is telling his threatened and fearful contemporaries: "We the church, not Caesar, shall reign on earth: (Cf. Rev. 5:10).

In the letter to Philadelphia, Christ gives to him who conquers this promise: "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God" (Rev. 3:12). This spoke directly and relevantly to the men of Philadelphia. Philadelphia, a city of many temples, "had a lovely custom which concerned these temples. When a man had served the state well, when he had left behind

him a noble record as a magistrate or as a public benefactor or as a priest, the memorial which the city gave to him was to erect a pillar in one of the temples with his name inscribed upon it. Philadelphia honored its illustrious sons by putting their names on the pillars of its temples . . . So the Risen Christ promises to the man who overcomes: I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God (Rev. 3:12). Not in any heathen temple, but in the very house and family of God, will the name of the man who is faithful be inscribed."⁵

William Barclay's generalization on this manner of inspired speaking is worth quoting: "All through this letter to Philadelphia we see how the message of the Risen Christ came to the people of Philadelphia in language and in pictures that they could understand. He took its history, He took the things that happened in everyday life, He took the civic practices which all men knew, and out of these earthly things He formed the heavenly message."⁶

This is but a small sampling; but it is, I believe a representative one. I have taken the examples from the New Testament in order to show that this culturally relevant manner of inspired speaking is characteristic of the whole bible. The Holy Spirit is consistent over the centuries; He always sovereignly confiscates what He needs.

It would seem, then, that the baptized, diaconic, eschatologically-responsible interpreter is following a sound hermeneutical principle when he looks into the historical surroundings of the Scriptures and attempts to reconstruct the setting and atmosphere in which a particular word of God was first spoken and heard in order that he may, as it were, become contemporary with it and hear it with contemporary ears. This is not one of

those self-willed and arbitrary modes of interpretation against which 2 Pet. 1:20 protests but is one suggested by, and based on, the modus operandi of the Spirit Himself. It is an application of the basic principle that Scripture interprets Scripture.

This mode of interpretation can be misused and has often been misused, as every good gift of God has been misused. The Spirit's sovereign freedom in confiscating any and every facet of human experience and history for His purposes can be (and has been) misinterpreted as a servile borrowing; thus the Scriptures come to be viewed as a product of their environment, as one more product of the human spirit and not the product of the Spirit. The Department of Exegetical Theology of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, has in a recent (1963) opinion warned against this abuse of the historical study of the Scriptures, by spelling out the assumptions under which historical study is to be carried out. These assumptions are: "1. That . . . the study . . . is carried out in believing submission to the inspired Scriptures as witnesses to Our Lord Jesus Christ, so that purely irrational considerations are excluded. 2. That the evidence of the Scriptures themselves is given prime consideration and that the employment of extra-Biblical evidence is subordinated to it. 3. That the inspired Scriptures are recognized in their uniqueness and that formal and substantial analogies with other writings are to be considered in the light of that overriding fact; that the interpreter must be aware of the possibility that he may be imposing alien classifications upon the Biblical materials and may be judging it by norms inappropriate to it . . . 4. That in the case of Old Testament figures, institutions, and events the witness of Our Lord and His apostles be given due consideration."

This aspect of interpretation is not the whole of interpretation, as our subsequent discussion will show. Neither can one say that it is absolutely indispensable. One need not, for example, know anything about Canaanite fertility cults in order to get an adequate idea of what the Serpent in Genesis 3 is getting at and how he is getting at it. We may be ignorant of Baalism, but we need not be "ignorant of his designs" (2 Cor. 2:11) for all that. And the Parable of the Pounds makes edifying reading even for the man who has never heard of Archelaus. But God has chosen to speak in this way. And if He has given us the means of hearing His past words with contemporary ears, dare we neglect that gift? Is not just this cultural relevance of His word an imperative guide for our proclamation of that Word? If the essayist's interpretation is right, the story of the Fall tells Israel that the Alienating Voice is not only something that was heard way back when; it is heard now, speaking insinuatingly in all those fascinating cults that the Israelite thought he could somehow synthesize with his worship of the LORD. If we hear the text thus in its relevance then and there, are we not bound to preach it in its relevance here and now? Might we not recognize the Alienating Voice more clearly, and help our people to recognize it, in the voice of Mormonism, of Jehovah's witnesses, of Masonry, of the American Way of Life as commonly understood (a maximum of material benefits and secular securities with a minimum of social responsibility), and of the Great God Fun? Perhaps we might be led to hear that Voice even closer to home, within the Church. The owner of that Voice haunts the wheat fields of God.

2. Symbol and History

The essayist stresses the presence and significance of symbolic or figurative elements in the narrative of the Fall.

All three of the essayist's questions on pages 10-12 involve, in one way or another, the question of the use of symbol in historical narrative.⁷ The first question (whether "the author possessed an earlier tradition or traditions of the Fall," p. 10) is in the last analysis unanswerable. We have no knowledge of any Fall-tradition that is demonstrably earlier than the record of Genesis 3. The employment of the analogy of Ezekiel 28 is inconclusive (pp. 11-12). As the essayist himself says, Ezekiel "describes the downfall of a specific individual, the Prince of Tyre, in terms of the account of the fall of the first man." (p. 12) There is really no way of telling how much of the detail in Ezekiel's description of the Prince's fall is suggested by the circumstances of the Prince's fall itself and how much may be drawn from an assumed independent tradition of the fall of the first man. This first question will not, therefore, be further dealt with in this analysis.

The essayist's second question (p. 12) deals with the matter of cultural relevance; this has been dealt with in the preceding section. Insofar as this involves the use of symbols, the second question can be answered together with the third question, which reads: "Do the literary features of Genesis 2-3 reveal a conscious literary formulation which is something other than a historicoo-literal presentation of the simple facts? Does the evidence warrant our considering the story of Genesis 3 as the concrete form which the ancient writer employed to make the truth of the revolt of the first man alive for the people of his day? Finally, even if the

evidence for such an interpretation, be it called symbolic, figurative, parabolic, metaphorical — and all of these terms are inadequate —, is not conclusive for each individual in the circle of the church, am I obliged to follow the strict historico-literal approach?" (pp. 12-13).

The kind of answer which the essayist would give to his question is best summed up in his own words: "Summarizing we can say that the text itself provides considerable evidence to support the thesis that the narrative wording is not always to be taken as a simple surface chronicle of events, but that deeper religious implications are frequently intended, and that the wording and characters of the story possess a character that may have symbolical aspects. It is our contention, therefore, that it is legitimate to consider this narrative a literary form which may be described as a 'symbolical religious history' . . . In other words, that which the writer wishes to describe is portrayed in terms of religious symbol and dramatic story, rather than in abstract terms of dogma or the secular annalistic terms of Historie as we have come to define the terms." (pp.22-23)

A similar summary presentation of the essayist's approach and findings appears on page 69: "We are obliged to recognize that he (the author) has delineated the Scriptural teaching of the revolt of the first man (and ultimately of all men in him) in the concrete form of a narrative or story. This narrative embraces a sequence of related incidents, incorporates current religious and cultural imagery and involves figures which have a symbolical or religious dimension to their character which reaches beyond the literal surface meaning of the text as we would read it . . . The account of Genesis 3, therefore, is the presentation of the biblical truth of the historical rebellion of the first man and its implications in the (literary) form of a 'symbolic' narrative." (Emphases mine)

The essayist contends (and his contention would seem to be justified) "that the conservative tradition provides us with the precedent for searching beyond the surface meaning of the text to consider the possibility that the passage in general is a 'symbolic' or concrete representation of divine truths concerning the fall of the first man." (p. 14). He lists as examples of such interpretation the equation of the Serpent with Satan, the identification of the cherubim with angels, "the import of Gen. 3:15 as something more than a conflict between snakes and men and the flaming sword a symbol rather than a tangible reality which is visible to any who would stand at the gate of Eden today." (p. 14) In other words, the essayist's mode of interpretation, on his view, differs in degree rather than in kind from that of the "conservative tradition."

N.B. It may be that the terminology employed by the essayist has tended to obscure the extent of his sympathy and agreement with our traditional approach and has magnified (at least in the minds of some) the difference between his approach and that of our tradition. Terms like "symbolic, figurative, parabolic, metaphorical," and even "symbolic religious history" (p. 13) all tend to suggest, perhaps, irreality, non-historicity (not-having-happened-ness), even though such was not the essayist's intention. The essayist himself is, apparently, not altogether satisfied with this terminology; "all of these terms are inadequate," he says on p. 31, and he adopts "symbolic religious history" as a working formula with the reservation, "despite its inadequacies," and with the explanatory note, "'Symbolic' may be tentatively defined as 'involving symbols!'" (p.13, note 12).

One can sympathize with him in his quest for an adequate and unambiguous term. It is noteworthy that two Old Testament scholars have (independently of each other, it seems) fixed upon the term "prophetic" in their attempt to define the peculiar character or quality of these early Genesis accounts. Eichrodt speaks of the early chapters of Genesis as "a truly prophetic interpretation of the world."⁸ And von Rad, aware that the term "saga" is in the last analysis inadequate as a designation for the histories of the Patriarchs, says: "We are not using too high a term when we ascribe to the witness of the Patriarch-sagas the adjective 'prophetic' (in the wider sense of that term)."⁹ — Would we not be on surer ground if we adopted this term, "prophetic," as the dominant designation for the narrative style of Genesis 3 and made the term "symbolic" subordinate to it? We could then speak of a "prophetically interpretive account of events, an account employing symbols to point up the significance of the events without calling into question the historicity of the events."

"Prophetic" is a biblical category and suggests biblical parallels. For example, the Song of the Vineyard in Isaiah 5:1-2 is all symbols; but the symbols speak of events, of God's love for His people documented by His deeds in that People's history and of Israel's apostatizing "wild-grapes" response to the love of God. This is a prophetically interpretive account of a genuine history and the symbols do the interpreting. The symbols make that history an indictment which the house of Israel and the men of Judah cannot ignore or evade. (cf. Is. 5:3-7)

Jesus, the ultimate prophet to Israel, recounts history in this prophetic-symbolic fashion also. The essayist has called attention to the fact that Jesus' parable of the Wicked Husbandmen is a prophetically

interpretive account of Israel's history down to His own day. (p.26) The account of the outrageous treatment of the Owner's messengers is symbolic, of course; but the symbol recounts and interprets history. The slaying of the Owner's Son was becoming history even as Jesus spoke. (cf. Matt. 21:45-46).

Most of Jesus' parables are capsule-history in symbolic or figurative form. The parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Prodigal Son are Jesus' prophetically-interpretive account of the history which His opponents had told in literal fashion when they said: "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). Which of the two accounts is the "true" one? Jesus' account is the "truer" one just because it is the prophetically interpretive account employing symbols.

Likewise the parables of the Two Sons, the Barren Fig Tree (Luke 13: 6-9; note the context), the Sower, the New Cloth on an Old Garment, the Strong Man Bound, the Mother Bird Gathering Her Young, are all historical in character; they deal, not with timeless truths but with the history that is being enacted before His contemporaries' eyes, the history of the Servant Messiah going His way of ministry to the cross. Jesus told history in this way because He was the Caller of Men, the Evangelist. By recounting history in this economical, plastic, and poignant manner He sought to open men's eyes to the fact of God's royal reign active in their land and in their time. The key to the understanding of the parables is just the fact that they recount the history of Jesus of Nazareth. The parables blind and harden the men who refuse to take them as history in symbol, who will not draw the line from the symbol of the Strong Man Bound by the Stronger to the "weak" Jesus of Nazareth whose history is being recounted and interpreted in the parable.

Paul is recounting and interpreting the history of Israel when he speaks of the "Baptism" and the "Supper" of Israel in the wilderness (1 Cor. 10:1-4). He is recounting the history of God's dealings with Jew and Gentile when he speaks of the Tree and the Engrafted Branches (Rom. 11:17-24). He is recounting history in a prophetically-interpretive way, by means of symbol, when he tells the Corinthians: "I became your father in Christ Jesus through the Gospel" (1 Cor. 4:15).

It seems clear that in the logic of the Holy Spirit "symbol" and hard, inescapable "historicity" are not mutually exclusive. "But," it may be urged, "none of the examples of symbol-narrative cited thus far is really a parallel to the situation in Genesis 3. All of them are somehow marked out as not purporting to be anything but what they are, symbolic summaries of history; they are marked out as such by their setting or by a preceding or an appended comment. Genesis 3, however, seems to present itself as a simple, straightforward account. Are there any analogies for the occurrence of symbolic elements in this kind of narrative?"

Our Gospels certainly present themselves as straightforward accounts; they are what the titles given them by the Church implies, Good News. Yet, are they so absolutely and unqualifiedly straightforward and symbol-free as the term "news" suggests? The genealogy of Jesus in Matthew 1 is as prosaic a series of "begats" as can be imagined. Yet even here the symbolic has its place. Matthew has given this series a symbolical structure of 3×14 generations, skipping some generations in order to do so, and he himself calls attention to this symbolism (Matt. 1:17). The presence of four women in the genealogy seem to have symbolic significance also. This symbolism of structure is found throughout the First Gospel.

The Book of Acts is certainly straightforward narrative; the value of the book depends entirely on the historicity of its content, the having-happened-ness of the events recorded. But even here we find a symbolic paralleling of the careers of Peter and Paul, as well as a symbolic parallelism of the wanderings and sufferings of Paul and his Lord. And Luke's recurrent refrain, "The word of the Lord grew," is not the language of prosaic chronicle. It is the symbolic language of a prophetic interpretation of history.

The employment of symbol in the recounting and interpreting of history is an ever-present possibility in the Scriptures. We must reckon with this possibility most strongly there where the thing narrated is without parallel in our mundane, day-by-day — or even century-by-century — existence. To take the most obvious examples: Our life knows nothing of an absolute beginning or of an absolute end. (We relativize the meaning of "create" and "creative" when we apply these words to human activity; and the people who say, "Death ends all," cannot ever quite believe it.) It is stupid and graceless to impose a "must" on the Holy Spirit; but speaking from where we sit in this dark aeon, absolute beginnings and absolute endings must be told in sign and symbol, or they cannot be told at all. The beginning of the world, the beginning of sin, the end of this world, and the definitive, the last judgment on sin — how shall these be conveyed to us who live in a world of relative beginnings, in a world where sin is the constant, given, dominant reality of human life, a world where every judgment on sin is only penultimate (the judge who imposes the death-sentence adds the words, "And may God have mercy on your soul.")?

The fact is that the Spirit does speak of Last Things in suggestive symbolism. The Scriptural accounts of the end of the world is so far from being diagrammatically clear and consistent that orthodox theologians

have wavered between the conception of an absolute annihilation of this world and a de novo creation, on the one hand, and recreative restoration of this world on the other hand and have often, wisely perhaps, left the question open. What all these accounts say to our consciences and our hope is abundantly and blessedly clear.

Take the two most detailed accounts of the Last Judgment that the New Testament offers, Matt. 25:31-46 and Rev. 20:11-15. Theologically they are absolutely at one; both speak to our consciences and to our hope in the same way, for both emphasize the fact that our acquittal in the Last Assize is due wholly and solely to the eternal gracious counsels of God ("O blessed of My Father;" "the book of life") and the fact that our believing lives have spelled out the verdict which we shall hear on the Last Day ("You did it to Me;" "judged by what was written in the books, by what they had done"). But in detail the two accounts differ at almost every point. Not even the person of the Judge is absolutely identical (Son of Man; Enthroned God). The inference is clear. The language is, in both accounts, the language of prophetically-interpretive symbol; and symbols need not be identical in order to agree.¹⁰

We are all haunted by a fear when we consider this mode of interpretation. We ask: Whither will this lead us? Where does it end? May we not be led by the logic of our methodology to the point where we rarefy all God's great actions for us men and for our salvation into principles and abstractions, ideas that may be exciting intellectually but cannot sustain us now in our tentationes nor help us in the hour of death? May we not finally conclude, for example, that the prime fact, the one on whose reality the whole future of mankind depends, the fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is only a symbolic way of saying that the influence

and power of Jesus somehow persists beyond His death and determines the lives of His followers?

To this fearful question two answers must be given. First, the prophetic-interpretive representation of an event employing symbols does not call into question the historicity of the event. When Peter speaks of Jesus' resurrection in terms of travail and birth ("the pangs of death," Acts 2:24), he is asserting the reality and historicity of the event. Secondly: To recognize the presence and value of symbolic language in a narrative where it is probable and recognizable is one thing; it is quite another thing to make of the reality corresponding to the symbol a mere symbol. In the case of the resurrection of Our Lord, there simply is no evading the fact that for every one of the chosen witnesses to that event, the resurrection is fact; it happened. According to these witnesses, the soldiers guarding the tomb fled in terror; the grave was empty and the graveclothes lay there neatly folded — even the Judaic rebuttal could not deny the empty tomb. The Risen Christ was seen by many and on various occasions. He spoke to them, He ate before them. He overcame their doubts. Paul in 1 Cor. 15 (probably the earliest written account of the event) nails the factuality of the resurrection down at all four corners and stakes the existence of the apostolate, the apostolic proclamation, the apostolic church, and the hope of mankind on the reality of the event of the resurrection. Whoever turns away from this has parted company with the New Testament.

3. The Unity of the Testaments

In a recent essay entitled "The Hermeneutics of the Old Testament"¹¹ Hans Walter Wolff has made two points that are of relevance for our discussion. The one is this: The ultimate and determinative context of the Old Testament is not the ancient Orient in which it came into being, and not the synagogue in which it was canonized, but the New Testament. "The new covenant in Christ corresponds to the covenant will of Yahweh as its fulfilment in the same way that marriage corresponds to engagement" (pp. 179-180), is a typical utterance of his on this point. The other point is that this ultimate New Testament context may and must be used to gain an understanding of the original intention of the Old Testament. "Consideration of the eschatological analogy of the New Testament promotes the investigation of intention in the explanation of a Old Testament text. Interpreting the texts only backwards and sideways must be recognized as an obviously erroneous method in Old Testament research . . . The constant consideration of the New Testament eschaton helps the expositor to interpret the Old Testament texts in a way that is true to the material, in a forward direction, in the direction of the actual witnessing intent of the texts in their contexts" (pp. 183-184). It is this question of the New Testament as the ultimate context of the Old that is primarily involved in our estimate of points c, d, and e of the essay (Protevangelion; Serpent and Satan; Man Created Mortal)

The essayist questions, the "Protevangelion: character of Genesis 3: 14-15.

The following statements are characteristic of the essayist's position on this point. Since the so-called Protevangelion "is embedded in a series

of curses: -- where one would not normally expect a promise or prediction of hope -- and since "each of the poetic oracles in this series (3:13-19) describes the conditions current at the time of the writer," the curse on the Serpent is not a prediction containing a promise of victory; indeed, it is not so much a prediction at all as a description "of the enmity existing in the author's age." (p. 58) "The snake is given the bad news that whenever man and snake meet a mortal conflict will ensue. His seed (subsequent generations of snakes) will be locked in mortal combat with the seed of woman (mankind). No relief is promised. Each delivers the same blow (shuph) where it will prove effective against the opponent" (p. 82). The essayist sees in this conflict something deeper than the "natural" enmity between men and snakes: "The observable antagonism between man and snake is apparently viewed as a symbol with a deeper religious meaning, namely, the life and death conflict between the forces of temptation unto death and the efforts of man to survive as a religious creature before God" (p. 83; cf. also p. 60)

Moreover, the essayist does see a connection between the Enmity Oracle and the culminating revelation of God in Jesus Christ. After the last-quoted passage he goes on to say: "Without the victory of Christ this struggle was doomed to failure. Inasmuch, however, as it portrays this enmity as a mortal conflict, it is, in a sense, a type of the struggle unto death of Jesus Christ, the Second Man. In this way the passage points to the death of Christ rather than to his victory." (p. 83; emphasis mine). The essayist has spoken in a similar vein previously, on page 62: "As we view this divinely decreed enmity and conflict between man and the forces of sin from the hindsight of the cross we can gain a richer

appreciation of the Calvary event as the struggle, the conflict, the sharpest intensity of that enmity where the forces of sin and the son of Adam are locked in mortal combat. Both parties perished." But the fact "that beyond the perishing of death the Second Man rose to assert victory for his seed" is part of "the New Word of Calvary," not expressed or implied in the Enmity oracle (p. 62). "The onus of proof . . . seems to lie with those who would detect a victory oracle or a pronouncement of hope within this passage itself." (p. 58)

The essayist probably has the majority of modern Old Testament exegetes on his side in putting a question mark before Genesis 3:15 as Protevangelion. The question is: Does this represent an exegetical advance and a deepened understanding of the passage over against that of, e.g., our Confessions, or is it a confirmation of H.W. Wolff's wry footnote, "2 Cor. 3:12 ff. shows itself as true in present-day exegesis of the Old Testament" ¹²? In other words, have Old Testament exegetes in their commendable zeal for understanding the Old Testament on its own terms forgotten that these terms include as a prime and indispensable element the ultimate context of the Old Testament, namely, the witness of the New Testament?

What is the witness of the New Testament in this case? What does it say concerning the Serpent and the Woman's seed? Romans 5:12-19 is a retelling of Genesis 3, the Fall is seen from the vantage-point of the raising-up of the fallen world in Christ. The One Man at the beginning is confronted by the One Man at the end. Is there any indication in Paul's words that the Spirit taught him to see in Genesis 3 any indication of the coming victorious One Man? Paul calls Adam the "type of the One who was

to come: (Rom. 5:14). The verb used here (mello) is one used frequently to denote that something must and will take place because the Word of God has promised it (cf. for Paul: Rom. 8:18; Gal. 3:23; Col. 2:17; 1 Th. 3:4; 2 Tim. 4:1; elsewhere in the New Testament: Matt. 11:14; 16:27; Luke 24:21; John 12:33; 18:32; Acts 11:28; 17:31; 24:15, 25: 26:22, 23; 1 Pet. 5:1, etc.). The only figure in the oracles of Genesis 3 that could be the subject of Paul's mellontos is, it would seem, the Woman's seed. (We may note in passing that Paul does not "modernize" the promise by stating it in terms of its fulfilment; he leaves it as indeterminate as it is in Genesis. This, of course, increases the probability that he is alluding to the Enmity Oracle.)

Genesis 3 seems to have been running through Paul's mind as he wrote his Letter to the Romans. Genesis 3:15 has left its impress on the promise of victory over the creators of divisions and offences in Rom. 16:20. And in Rom. 7:7 ff. Paul described the subtle and deadly workings of sin in terms that are obviously suggested by the story of the Fall. Of particular interest for our question is the allusion to Genesis 3 in Rom. 8:20-21. There Paul says that creation was subjected to futility and that when this subjection took place there was present a hope that creation too would be liberated and participate in "the glorious liberty of the children of God." Now if we look in Genesis 3 for a word of hope uttered before the cursing of the ground for man's sake, the only possible candidate is the word which speaks of the crushing of the Serpent's head by the heel of the Woman's Seed.

The Nestle-Aland edition of the Greek New Testament cites Genesis 3:15 in the margin at Gal. 4:4. But the expression "born of woman" is

hardly enough to establish a connection with the Genesis word on the Woman's Seed, and the context gives no support. The same must be said of the possibility of an allusion to Genesis 3:15 (also noted by Nestle-Aland) in Luke 10:9. The temptation to perpetrate bad exegesis in a good cause is one that must be resisted.

Paul's use of Genesis 3:15 in the letter to the Romans is allusive; the connection is presupposed and utilized, not argued or demonstrated. This makes these passages strong evidence for Paul's conception of the Enmity oracle. The use of Genesis 3:15 in Rev. 12 is much more outspoken. The references to the Woman, the Woman's Seed, the Enmity, and "that ancient Serpent" are so palpable as to be beyond dispute. It will suffice to call attention to one feature that might be passed over; that is the description of the church as "the rest of the Woman's seed" in v. 17.

The New Testament references to Genesis 3:15 are not many; but they all agree in viewing Genesis 3:15 as a victory oracle. It is not our business as exegetes to twist the Old Testament into conformity with the New, no matter what; but it is our business to look upon what is there in the Old Testament with eyes of the heart enlightened by the New. What is there in the words and context of Genesis 3:15?

We note first the elementary and obvious fact that Genesis 3:15 is part of the curse on the Serpent, not on woman and not on man. This "blood-feud," as the essayist has so strikingly called it, bodes ill for man, to be sure; and the essayist is quite right in emphasizing the somberness of the prospect in the history of man. But the prime emphasis and the center of gravity in the oracle is what this enmity means for the Serpent. In the light of this fact one may doubt whether it is exegetically

| tenable to see in the crushing of the head and the crushing of the heel
| merely a fearful and fatal equipose, with no visible prospect of a reso-
| lution. Only the use of the verb shuph supports this view. The fact that
| the two statements are connected by waw is not decisive, waw is a flexible
word. The RSV translators render it with a "yet" in 3:16, rightly.

And the old argument that having one's head crushed is a more serious business than a mashed heel retains its force, especially if one considers the part played by the rosh in Old Testament anthropology. Johannes Pedersen has put it well: "In the head the soul is prominent. It bears honor, it bears disgrace or, upon the whole, responsibility. A crime comes over the head of a man when he bears the responsibility of it (Ezek. 9:10, 11:21; 16:43 et. al.) To be the keeper of a man's head (1 Sam. 28:2) is the same as to guard his life. 'A man's head' is the same as a man."¹³ To be sure, other parts of the body may also be thought of as representative of the whole man. But one looks in vain for a passage where "heel" is so used.

| For the Serpent the oracle spells definitive doom, and that too by
| the agency of the progeny (seed) of the woman. This prospect spells hope
| for man. The fact that there will be a grim struggle does not call that
hope into question. Indeed, the very fact that there can be a struggle
is already a piece of the Protevangelion. In the logic of divine retri-
bution man could not struggle with the serpent; he had listened to the
Serpent's voice and obeyed; he had made the Serpent his de facto God.
"You are slaves of the one whom you obey," is Paul's formulation of this
logic of divine retribution (Rom. 6:16).

What could the first man have made of this? In a sense, this question has only an antiquarian interest. But the text does say that it was Adam himself who gave his wife the name of hope, the name that marked her as "the mother of all living." Where did he find the grounds and courage for such name-giving?

What could the original Israelite audience have made of this? As the essayist's scholarly and searching exposition makes clear, Genesis 3 is not exactly a naive document, it presupposes and demands alert and sensitive auditors, alive to tones and overtones. H. Frey suggests that the crushing of the head would recall for men of that time and place a widespread Rettermotiv.¹⁴ Perhaps so. But we know certainly that the people who heard this word of God were conditioned for this hearing not only by their experience of the thorn-infested ground, of sweaty toil, and of agonized childbearing. They came to this word as people who knew the covenant-grace of the LORD who planted a blessing for Abraham, for Abraham's seed, and for all the families of the earth on the accursed ground.

The fact that the Enmity Oracle is "embedded in a sequence of curses" (p. 58) does not, then preclude the possibility that the curse on the Serpent is a promise to man. Moreover, the essayist himself notes "a dual perspective throughout the curses of Genesis 3; life under the curse offers grace in the face of death." (p. 61). And this, too, marks these words as "prophetic," this curiously intertwined annunciation of doom and blessing is found elsewhere in prophecy also. The mysterious Immanuel prophecy of Isaiah 7 is, however one may interpret the details, the annunciation of both judgment and deliverance. The promise of the

Deliverer from Bethlehem in Micah 5 both presupposes and renews the doom pronounced on Jerusalem in Micah 3:12.

The essayist declines to make a simple, direct identification between the Serpent and Satan (i.e. from the vantage-point of the original Israelite audience).

The response to this point has been in part anticipated in the preceding section. Since the essayist accepts the New Testament identification of Serpent and Satan (p. 35), the question of whether "the ancient Israelite also made this identification" (p. 35) becomes rather academic. One wonders, moreover, whether the essayist has not worked himself into a false antithesis when he affirms that "the writer of Genesis 3 sees the snake primarily as the sinister representation of temptation to sin rather than the incarnation of a demonic being (p. 36. Emphasis mine, Note also the following sentence). Whether an ancient Israelite could write the chapter on Satan in a modern dogmatics, is one thing. Whether he could recognize in the Serpent "the sinister representation of temptation to sin," is another. But the two do not constitute an antithesis. Whatever the associations the word "Serpent" had for the ancient Israelite, he could recognize this Serpent as clearly and characteristically (disguised) anti-Deity, and that is the quintessence of the Satanic. The New Testament, the ultimate context of the Old, speaks of Satan as "the murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44). Evidently Satan was in existence and, what is worse, at work long before he received any of his many names. And the New Testament teaches us that he prefers anonymity; he works by preference through a Peter (Matt. 16:23), through emissaries who resemble servants of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:15,) through "beasts" that give themselves an aura of divinity (Rev. 13).

The essayist maintains that man was created mortal.

Note: My study of the essayist's statements on this point led me to the conclusion that the essayist had involved himself in a contradiction. ✓
He seemed to be saying a) that "eternal life was man's destined gift" (p. 63), and also b) that man was from the beginning and by nature mortal (p. 85 "the mortality that was his"), which I understood to mean that God created man to die, that He willed from the beginning to take from man the life which He had given man. A subsequent discussion with the essayist revealed that he was operating with a (never fully spelled out) distinction between "mortal death" and "eternal death;" that on his view the mortality that is man's does not exclude eternal life beyond death as God's gift to man. I deem it right, therefore, that further discussion of the essayist's views on this point be held in abeyance until the essayist has had an opportunity to clarify his position before the body to which his original presentation was made.

Footnotes

1. For a much longer list of such expressions, see A. Schlatter, Die Geschichte des Christus (Stuttgart: Calwerverlag, 1923), p. 34, note 1. I should be inclined to question some of the words in Schlatter's list as being so close to Old Testament language as to be practically a loose quotation of it. But Schlatter's generalization holds true: Jesus, he says, "nahm . . . die jetzt lebenden Gedanken in sich auf, auch wenn sie erst nach dem Abschluss des Kanons durch die seit her geschehene Denkarbeit entstanden waren." (ibid.)
2. Cf. Strack - Billerbeck I, pp. 711-717.
3. H. Lietzmann, An die Korinther (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1949), p. 211 (in the Anhang by W. G. Kümmel)
4. T W N T IV, p. 137, 15-31. Translation my own.
5. W. Barclay, Letters to the Seven Churches (Naperville: SCM Book Club, 1957), pp. 98-99.
6. Ibid. p. 99
7. "Historical" will be used naively throughout, simply to designate the having-happened-ness of what is being narrated.
8. "Eine wahrhaft prophetische Deutung der Welt." (Translation my own.) Theologie des Alten Testaments (Göttingen: Vandehoeck und Ruprecht, 1961) Vol. 2/3, p. 280.

9. "Es ist nicht zu hoch gegriffen, wenn wir dem Zeugnis der Vätersagen in einem weiteren Sinne des Wortes einen prophetischen Art zuschreiben."

(Translation my own) Das Erste Buch Mose (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1958), p. 28.

10. The fact that the account of the Fall looks backward to a past event and the account of the Judgment looks forward to a future event is not of decisive importance here. The common denominator is the prophetic character of the account; the prophet is the interpreter of God's will and work, past, present and future.

11. In Essays on Old Testament Interpretation, edited by Claus Westermann; English translation edited by James Luther Mays (London; SCM Press, 1963), pp. 160-199.

12. Op. cit., p. 182, n. 75.

13. Israel, Its Life and Culture (London: Oxford University Press, 1959), I-II, p. 174.

14. Das Buch der Anfänge (Stuttgart: Calwerverlag, 1950), p. 51.